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How Queer is *Queer*? Burroughs' Novella through Rose-Tinted Glasses

*¿*Queer *es queer? La novela corta de Burroughs leída con gafas de colo de rosa*

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Abstract: Using tools from Cultural Studies, Linguistics and Translation Studies, and following Keith Harvey´s (2000) methodology in the analysis of gay camp in translation, this paper studies William Burroughs' novella *Queer* (written in 1953, published in 1985, and translated into Spanish in 2013). Considering the historical differences in 1953, 1985 and 2013 to frame the context of production, the article ponders on the two literary systems which the work entered to discuss its reception. Additionally, while at times Burroughs' novella steps away from traditional «gay slang» (Penelope and Wolfe 1979), which Burroughs reportedly despised, some other times it sinks deep into «camp»: In Marcial Souto's translation, «butch» and «camp» blend while some of the sexual power of the source is lost in translation. Tapping into Souto's translation, we may see how far (or near) queer studies and queer translation have gone in the last sixty years.

Keywords: Camp; Queer Translation; Cultural Studies; Cultural Margins; Otherness.

Resumen: Utilizando las herramientas de Estudios Culturales, Lingüística y Traductología, y siguiendo la metodología propuesta por Keith Harvey (2000) en el

análisis del estilo *camp* gay y su traducción, este trabajo estudia la novela corta *Queer*, de William Burroughs (escrita en 1953, publicada en 1985 y traducida al castellano en 2013). El artículo considera las diferencias de los tres contextos de producción y los dos sistemas literarios a los que ingresó con el fin de discutir su recepción. Asimismo, mientras en ocasiones la novela de Burroughs se aleja del estilo de jerga gay tradicional (Penelope y Wolfe 1979), que el autor supuestamente despreciaba, en otros momentos se sumerge profundo en el estilo *camp*: en la traducción de Marcial Souto, lo «macho» y lo «camp» se combinan mientras que algo de la fuerza sexual del texto fuente se pierde en la traducción. A través del análisis del trabajo de Souto, veremos el camino transitado por la traducción *queer* durante los últimos 60 años.

Palabras clave: *Camp*; Traducción *Queer*; Estudios Culturales; Márgenes; Otredad.

1. INTRODUCTION

In translation studies, the cultural margins have acquired a key importance as dynamic spaces of political action in defense of the literatures of the oppressed. However, beyond the interest in these literatures, the question remains whether translators focus their energy to represent these source, oppressed cultures, or whether their craft is permeated by mainstream subjectivities which condition them socially in the target culture.

Using tools from Cultural Studies, Linguistics and Translation Studies, I have studied William Burroughs' novella *Queer* (written in 1953 and published in 1985). The fact that the work did not enter the English literary system for over 30 years because its author feared legal prosecution due to the sexually-explicit nature of his text is in itself thought-provoking. Moreover, its translation was published in Spanish only in 2006, with the definitive edition being published in 2013, 60 years after it was written and almost 30 years after its first edition in English.

In principle, my paper tackles the historical differences in 1953, 1985 and 2013 to frame the contexts of production and publication, and ponders on the two literary systems which the work entered to discuss its reception. Considering that, in the sixty years that elapsed from its English version to its Spanish definitive edition version, the Stonewall riots and the gay liberation movement occurred as well as other milestones that shook the very foundations of gay literature, this synchronic analysis may shed some light on the reasons for its publication. Additionally, while at times Burroughs' novella steps away from traditional «gay slang» (Penelope and Wolfe 1), which Burroughs reportedly despised, some other times it sinks deep into «camp» (see Sontag 1961; Penelope and Wolfe 1979; Harvey 2000) or at least flirts with it profusely.

2. BEFORE, AROUND AND AFTER STONEWALL: THE HISTORY OF GAY LIBERATION

The seed of the gay American liberationist movement may be traced back to only one or two moments in U.S. history. According to historian Allan Bérubé, the birth of the «gay awakening» date back to the postwar period when, for the first time, gay men felt they were the targets of official discrimination (Marcus 21). The author believes that the unprecedented persecution of the time led to the realization that homosexuality had abandoned the private sphere to become a public matter, which in turn called for the creation of organizations to protect the rights of the eclectic group. The 1948 publication of the Kinsey Report created the word «homosexual» and defined LGBT+ identities as pathological, setting the mores of normality in mainstream America.

In this context, it is plausible that William Burroughs did not publish his manuscript as «it was considered too controversial to publish» (McDowell). Persecution was rampant to homosexuals at the time, so authors like D'Emilio (1998) believe that the germ of the gay liberation movement lies precisely in this new form of persecution, which called for action of the part of LGBT+ groups.

The first collective effort for a Gay Liberation Movement occurred a few years after the publication of the Kinsey Report with the creation of the Mattachine Society in the 1950s. The main issue at hand was not only that the members of the Mattachine Society were gay men and lesbians, but also that they were Socialists and Communists, radicals who considered themselves some form of «NAACP for gays» (qtd. in D'Emilio 2); that is, leftist radicals in search for rights.

Much though the Mattachine Society was a relatively short-lived experiment, it paved the way for future civil rights debates and it underlined the diversity within the group: queens, fairies, butch numbers and lesbians, among others. As Paul Phillips, a black member of the group, indicates referring to the segregated times of the 1950s:

> I went to Mattachine in the first place to meet somebody who was like me, somebody gay. That was the primary purpose of my going. Once I found out there were others besides me, I was much better able to accept myself. (Marcus 65)

The first instances of coming together and drafting claims for gay liberation were marked by the constant fear of exposure. Thus, the resulting association remained mostly underground.

Despite the fact that after eleven years of meetings the Mattachine Society had only been able to gather less than four hundred members in different charters across the country and that «For all but a few, the dangers posed by exposure were too great to risk involvement with an organization for homosexuals» (Marcus 73), new groups were gathering particularly in the major cities of the country. The press started to take note of

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these groups because they began demonstrating «following the example of the black civil rights movement» (Marcus 74). While blacks coined slogans such as «Black is Beautiful», in many gay demonstrations outside the White House, the LGBT+ collective carried banners reading «Gay is good». A change started to operate in the minds of many gay men and lesbians, fueled perhaps by a slight liberalization of obscenity laws that was paving the way for books, plays, physique magazines and films that would have been regarded as lewd only ten years before. Even though much of mainstream culture still considered same-sex desire degenerate, homoeroticism had ceased to be invisible in society: Civil suits, favorable court rulings and authoritative medical books were already leading the way of times to come.

However, change for LGBT+ publications was slow, especially due to a fierce state oppression. By 1969, Greenwich Village in New York was a little haven with a few places where gay men and lesbians could gather somehow freely despite the frequent raids. One evening, just after midnight June 27-28, a group of officers from the New York Tactical Police Force called a raid on the Stonewall Inn at 55 Christopher Street. That night, when the people who had been in the bar raid were released, they decided to wait around outside while the police dispatched those less fortunate in the vans. At the time, Christopher St. was a very common cruising area, and so there were many people who gathered around the tavern at the sight of what was happening. What was unique about that night was that it was the first time when lesbians and gay men manifested their outrage in the open against the oppression they felt as a group.

Not only did some 300 to 400 people attempt to stop the arrests by erupting into violent protest, but they even tried to burn down the bar with the police officers barricaded inside. These confrontations between demonstrators and police that weekend are usually cited as the beginning of the modern movement for gay liberation. «The Stonewall riot was able to spark a nationwide grassroots 'liberation' effort among gay men and women in large part because of the radical movements that had inflamed much of American youth during the 1960s» (D'Emilio 233). Not only did this group take the militant example of groups such as the Black Panthers to fight: many gay individuals were themselves black or Latino.

Thus, the 1970s saw the Gay Liberation Movement adopt many of the strategies that other liberationist movements had already proved effective. Apart from the fact that there was more openness in the media about gay issues, «by the early 1970s, the number of gay and lesbian organizations soared to nearly four hundred» (Marcus 121), a far cry from the mere 400 secretive members of the Mattachine Society ten years before. By the mid-1970s that number had escalated to over 1,000 organizations distributed all over the country (D'Emilio 2). The decade witnessed a new paradigm in queer-mainstream relations.

Eric Marcus (1992/2002) outlines two different periods in the Gay Liberation Movement after the 1970s, which roughly coincide with the next two decades,

«1973-1981. Coming of Age» and «1981-1992. In the Shadow of AIDS». While Marcus has reason to showcase the coming-of-age period as a moment for settling down marked by the loss of the leftist passion typical of the late 1960s and 1970s and the advent of AIDS as the period distinguished by the fear of coming out, I believe that both periods may be defined by progressive battles to gain rights that were fought in different major cities throughout the United States.

It is undeniable that the mid-1980s were harsh times for the LGBT+ community. However, the AIDS crisis contributed to unite queer political groups. More LGBT+ plays, novels, magazines and films were made between 1985 and 1990 than in the 100 years before. This is the context of publication of Burroughs' novel.

In his essay *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality*, Patrick Moore (2004) recuperates AIDS as a pivotal aspect of queer history. In that respect, the author recounts the flourishing gay community that thrived in the cultural margins of New York and San Francisco in the 1960s and 1970s, until the beginning of and throughout the AIDS crisis of the mid-1980s. According to the author, William Burroughs was an active participant in the radical gay scene of the mid-1970s. AIDS came to dissipate the creative environment that was blooming in the cultural borders. What ensued in the period was the process of desexualization of the gay community: In a compromise of sorts, Moore believes, assimilation to heteronormative mores entailed resigning to the promise of an unequivocal culture that could operate from the margins preserving a unique identity.

Similarly, Michael Bronski (2000) has warned about the dangers of assimilation that since the 1980s have threatened the gay community, «All unmodified subcultures pose a threat to the perceived cohesion of the dominant culture. This threat is usually decreased through the process of assimilation» (Bronski 62). Assimilation allows mainstream society to make differences more palatable because they can be made to mimic heteronormative models. Considering that William Burroughs was a writer who had always rejected mainstream values, and who was highly connected with different *avant guard* artists, it is at least a remarkable coincidence that *Queer* was published at a time when AIDS was rapidly ravishing the world of art (and society at large, clearly) while undermining the belligerent stance of the queer community which adhered to non-mainstream values. As Moore believes, «Artists fulfill two unique functions in society – to document and to transcend borders» (183). In that respect, the publication of *Queer* came at a time when a leading voice in LGBT+ literature may have been most needed.

Nonetheless, in the midst of the conservative 1980s society that officially somehow denied AIDS, laureate author William Burroughs was not to be that voice. It is interesting to observe that *The New York Times* dismissed the author's sexual preferences at the time the book was published in 1985, characterizing the protagonist of the story as a lonesome social reject, «It is neither a love story nor a tale of seduction but a revelation of self-protective rituals of communication that substitute for contact in a hostile or

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indifferent environment» (Marten). The stance of the newspaper goes in tune with the asexualization of gays at the time and of the disdain for queer culture. The newspaper's review of the novella underlines the fact that Burroughs (through his alter ego Lee, the protagonist of the story) derides «ludicrous homosexuals». In tune with the times, critics ensconced Burroughs queer identity in favor of the creation of a literary persona beyond the sordidness of gay sex:

> [The novella is a] blueprint for many of Mr. Burroughs's themes, narrative techiques [sic] and charcterizations [sic], it helps us come to grips with the dark humor, violent energy and unsettling vision of this writer who has forced himself into our consciousness and seized a place in our literary history (Marten).

Thus, even if Burroughs might have agreed to publish his novella as an anti-assimilationist feat, critics contributed to the perpetuation of the figure of the writer as a man who objected the mannerisms typical of camp.

3. THE BIRTH OF QUEER LIBERATION

Guy Hocquenghem (1972/2009) was a French philosopher who wrote *The Homosexual Desire*, only three years after the Stonewall riots. His book is deemed by many as the seed of queer theory. In the context of the historical background portrayed on these pages, it aims at shedding some light regarding the mind frame that would shape gay literary outputs in the years to come.

Hocquenghem indicates that the fear which homosexuality awakens in heterosexual individuals springs from certain insecurity regarding homosexual desire. This fear awakens medical, legal and judicial responses on mainstream society. Another point worth stressing is the fact that Hocquenghem paves the way to queer theory underlining the idea of the multiplicity of non-heterosexual practices within the gay and lesbian community:

> The plural character of homosexual desire makes it dangerous to hegemonic sexuality. A thousand gay behaviors challenge the taxonomy that they try to impose upon them every day. The unification of gay desire practices under the term «homosexuality» is as preposterous as the unification of the partial drives of ego (Hocquenghem 1972/2009, 129, my translation).

It is undeniable that in 1972 Hocquenghem gave theorists leeway to later contend that the umbrella of queer theory covers well beyond white, upper-middle class, gay men who engage in same-sex practices that mimic heteronormative roles.

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Another thinker who paved the way for the Queer Theory that was developed in the 1990s and later by authors such as Butler, Sedgwick, de Laurentis or Halperin was French philosopher Michel Foucault (1978/1990), who used a model of discourse, knowledge and power. His contributions on power and sexual dissidence are generally regarded as the starting point for the analysis of queer theory.

Foucault sees repression as the key to liberation from the social taboos that centuries of institutional domination, which paradoxically functions as the outlet for the liberation of the subject, «If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, non-existence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression» (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 6), an idea very much in tune with the way in which scholars like D'Emilio see World War II oppression as the source of self-realization. The interplay of power (as a tool for submission) and language (as a tool for freedom) are important factors at the time of analyzing a type of literature that fosters non-standard forms of sexual expression. Foucault sees the possibility of self-expression as the first step toward the liberation from the moral bounds set forth by a society that heavily relies on the oppression of the masses. Breaking social mandates is a subversive enterprise, but one of vital character to transgress norms, as a form of advancement toward new territory. In this respect, William Burroughs' publication of *Queer* in 1985 may be regarded as a liberating act on the part of the author, a coming-to-terms with the harsh reality he underwent or, as Burroughs has reportedly said, to cope with the «lifelong struggle, in which I have had no choice except to write my way out» (Schjeldahl).

As society evolves changing the relationships established between individuals, social norms tend to be adapted to these changes. In this context, the realm of transgression is placed in what today we may consider the cultural borders; that is, in the area furthest removed from the center of these norms. Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of a passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses (Foucault, «A Preface to Transgression» 34). Foucault sees the space for transgression as a line that is never crossed, a horizon of sorts that is redefined as the boundaries set by transgression are expanded. As an act, transgression is bound to fail: The space conquered, instantly becomes established territory; it is normalized, which calls for the need to progress further toward new limits, which are always the breeding grounds for transgression.

Within the context of the struggle in queer history, it is possible to ascertain that the advances in the socio-political field throughout the 20th century are forms of transgression. «Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance to find itself in what it excludes» (Foucault, «A Preface to Transgression» 34). William Burroughs used literature to expunge his guilt in the tumultuous fifties. Some thirty years later, the publication of

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Queer somehow foreshadows the birth of Queer Theory. Nonetheless, so far, and despite its title, the novella has usually not been analyzed to its full potential on the part of queer critics.

As one of the forefathers of queer theory, Michel Foucault paved the way for contemporary analyses of gay and lesbian literature due to his comprehension of the elements at play in the transgression of social norms. As Hocquenghem, he discussed social movements which upset the establishment tapping into alternative lifestyles. Their contributions later consolidated in what we understand as queer theory much though their goal was to revise history in the making.

4. TRANSLATING «CAMP». A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1961, Susan Sontag attempted to define camp, as she could detect it in different literary sources, in her influential essay «Notes on Camp». The fragmented quality of the piece allows the direct application of her ideas onto other literary texts. In her enumeration of the qualities of camp, we can observe its main features:

> In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails. Of course, not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as Camp. Only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve. (Sontag 285)

It is not a coincidence, then, that queer literature finds in camp a discursive style to overcome the tragic existence of the marginalized and celebrate differences with irony as the most frequently used strategy to ameliorate the tragedy of the life of many gay characters as well as of members of the LGBT+ community. Upsetting expectations by pairing the so-called tragic and the commonplace is a camp strategy. Sontag indicates that camp sensibility is one «that, among other things, converts the serious into the frivolous» (275). The irony of superimposing the inconsequential and the intimate provides relief to tension in much queer literature. To Sontag, camp «is not a natural mode of sensibility, if there be any such. Indeed, the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration» (279). Camp often becomes a common denominator for LGBT+ works through the playful treatment of harsh topics to mock established norms with ridicule, and its light tone is gained through the disdain of seriousness and the obsession with the ordinary. In that respect, the author believes that it is «the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of 'style' over 'content', 'aesthetics' over 'morality', of irony over tragedy» (283).

Although it is arguable that camp language may hardly have been a novelty as a form of representation of LGBT+ characters at the time of the publication of *Queer*

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in 1985, given that many milestones in gay literature (that date back to such works as Oscar Wilde's a century before) make extensive use of it, and much less in the 21st century when *Queer* was published in Spanish, it is true that camp somehow permeated some of the dialogues and certain turns in Burroughs' novel in spite of the author's disdain for overt flamboyant mannerism. In his previous novel, *Junkie* (1953, published in Spanish as *Yonqui* in 1980), Lee, its Midwestern narrator complains:

> In the French Quarter there are several queer bars that are so full every night the fags spill out on to the sidewalk. A room full of fags gives me the horrors. They jerk around like puppets on invisible strings, galvanized into hideous activity that is the negation of everything living and spontaneous. The live human being has moved out of these bodies long ago. But something moved in when the original tenant moved out. Fags are ventriloquists' dummies who have moved in and taken over the ventriloquist. The dummy sits in a queer bar nursing his beer, and uncontrollably yapping out of a rigid doll face (72).

Despite the reigning homophobia and misanthropy of the excerpt, Burroughs does resort to camp language in his creation of his gay alter ego in *Queer*. Julia Penelope and Susan Wolfe (1979) were probably the first scholars to analyze gay slang from a linguistic perspective after Sontag's precursory «Notes on Camp»:

> We seek to discover a system of values carried by «gay slang» within a sociolinguistic context that defines the primary function of argots, cant, and slang as specialized uses of language for the purpose of establishing and maintaining cohesion within a special interest group. Such specialized languages quickly identify the members of a group to each other, provide them a system for expressing concepts and values inherent and unique to the group, and exclude non-members. (3)

In this respect, their work has paved the way for subsequent studies on the translation of camp style. Keith Harvey (2000) believes that camp is not a linguistic sign but a cultural one that, in tune with Sontag's ideas, functions as a form of self-defense against external aggression as well as a strategy for community building. Thus, the author outlines the typical characteristics of camp as a preoccupation with sex, fake adherence to morals, inversion of gender, queer renaming, foreign language intrusions, the construction of a theatricalized woman, hyperbole and exclamation, pop culture intertexts and linguistic incongruity; that is, mixing levels of formality and informality, which produces a certain awkwardness at times in the text (449-456). These features produce a sort of inappropriateness that acts as a position of resistance against mainstream culture.

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In turn, William M. Burton (2010) has also proposed a possible queer translation practice of LGBT+ literature noting that «Though queer does have an anti-identity component, the word retains the anti-assimilationist, fiercely identitarian force it had when first reclaimed» (Burton). While Harvey presents over half a dozen camp markers that the translator has to look into with great detail to ensure the preservation of camp in the target language, Burton's idea of queer translation focuses on translation as a antihomophobic practice he has called «inversion […], a turning of the text against itself: inverting the hidden power relations of heterosexism by revealing and underscoring it through techniques borrowed from feminists» (Burton).

From the point of view of translation, Burton's approach is geared toward translation as a practice. However, Harvey's model –which functions at the moment of translating a text as a catalogue of features where the translator needs to focus– also works as a tool for the analysis of translations. For that reason, this is the model which will be applied in this study. It is important to bear in mind Harvey's catalogue of camp language because the history of the publication of the novel *Queer* spans over almost 60 years until it was published in Spanish. This period has not only seen the tremendous achievements and conquests of the LGBT+ liberationist movement in the United States and in the Spanish-speaking world alike but also an incredible advancement in translation studies.

5. HOW QUEER CAN *QUEER* BE?

As pointed out, *Queer* was written in 1953 and published in 1985. While it is true that Burroughs feared that he would be arrested on charges of indecency if the novel was published in the 1950s and 1960s, editors and critics alike agree that Burroughs considered this work a minor effort not worth publishing, a disjointed set of notes with no structure and no focus. However, *Queer* is a precursor of the cut-up style that Burroughs later explored in *Naked Lunch* (1959). Additionally, *Queer* exposes the persona of the narrator at his most vulnerable: a gay man infatuated with a young, good-looking man while undergoing withdrawal syndrome. Burroughs may have well despised gay slang, gaylese, fagtalk, or queerspeech, but he was himself a user of camp. In a letter to Allen Ginsberg –his agent at the time– Burroughs makes certain demands that Ginsberg was to fulfill when his publishers wanted to title his second novel *Fag*:

> That's just what I've been trying to put [...] *over*, is the distinction between us strong, manly, noble types and the leaping, jumping, window dressing cock-sucker. Furtherchrissakes, a girl's gotta draw the line somewhere or publishers will swarm all over her sticking their nasty old bibliographical prefaces up her ass (qtd. in Glick 2009, 128).

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The inversion of gender in the final sentence is proof enough that in spite of his rejection of the effeminate, Burroughs was not only capable of camp language, but that it is possible that his paradoxical rejection of it was the result of the reigning oppression of gays and the *sprit du temps* that permeated American society in the 1950s. William Burroughs has been idealized, idolized and masculinized by the critics, the academia and the heterosexist, discriminatory literary world at large, a world that has stated, like Norman Mailer, that «Burroughs is a real man» (qtd. in Russell, unnumbered preliminary pages). A queer reading of *Queer*, both in the source version and in its 2013 translation, may prove to be a contribution to Cultural Studies as well as to translation studies.

6. 1985 TO 2013. A SMALL STEP FOR A BOOK, A GIANT LEAP FOR QUEER LIB

Undoubtedly, AIDS shook the foundations of the movement by producing a certain retreat from the big fights in favor of a new focus «as those afflicted with AIDS were fired from jobs, evicted from their homes, and denied health insurance» (Marcus 1992/2002, 45). In a way, the passion that brewed in the 1970s due to a certain feeling of contentment and the development of a queer alternative culture was undermined from the 1980s due to media attacks and political setbacks. Nonetheless, the violence exerted socially and politically upon the queer community backlashed in the form of an impetus and new energy that was put to political fights in the 1990s. When the turmoil and initial panic produced by AIDS gave way to institutionalized policies that forgot the idea of a gay-exclusive disease (in spite of government policies by Republican Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr.), «new and existing gay rights groups [began] turning their attention to classic issues, including same-sex marriage or its legal equivalent, antigay violence, and the status of gay people in the military» (Marcus 1992/2002, 246). Largely, these fights are still raging despite the conquests gained.

Thus, the 1990s meant a rebirth of the movement, which by this time had permeated to most of the Western world, where the legal standing of gay and lesbian people changed radically in many countries and where major policy overhauls took place. It is interesting to note that in many of the conquests, policy-makers relied on the attitudes that had taken place in racial liberation movements. As former Vice President Al Gore says referring to the debate about the inclusion of gays in the military, «That was pretty much the same argument made against integrating African-Americans into the military» (as cited in Marcus 1992/2002, 350). In a way, not only did the Gay Liberation Movement learn from other minorities about how to come out politically, policy-makers, the media and the corporate world also looked toward the liberation movements of other cultural subgroupings to come to terms with the idea of gay and lesbian rights. All in all, the media started to see gay men and lesbians in a new light.

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> By the start of the 1996 television season realistic gay and lesbian television characters were situation-comedy staples, appearing in more than twenty shows ranging from *Roseanne* and *Friends* to *Mad About You* and *Melrose Place*, but were all in secondary or supporting roles (Marcus 1992/2002, 372).

That same season had female actor Ellen DeGeneres come out of the closet in her ABC network show *Ellen* as well as in her own personal life, which gained her the cover of *Time* magazine, a lead editorial in *The New York Times* and endless media coverage in early 1997, making her the first open lesbian in a prime-time TV show. The following year saw rival NBC network raise the bar and have two gay men as protagonists of the prime-time sitcom *Will and Grace*.

Although so very much changed in the period portrayed in this account, the world still faces major issues regarding discrimination. The openness in Latin America and Spain and the acceptance in the mainstream media is promising. From the few militants that gathered in secret in New York and San Francisco to the ever-growing number of organizations that struggle for gay rights today all over the world, the road travelled points to a minority that will not relinquish its fight for LGBT+ rights. Thus, when in 2013 Anagrama published *Queer* in Spanish, the book may have come as an odd description of times long past in most of the Western world, unless of course the translation was not promoted as essentially LGBT+.

7. WHEN *QUEER* IS *QUEER*, WITH A LATINO ACCENT

Marcial Souto translated the Spanish version of Burroughs' definitive edition of the novel in 2013 for Spanish publishing house Anagrama. The novel came out with the title *Queer*, a transference or borrowing that greatly mitigates the harshness of the original, in favor of – perhaps – gaining from the wide use of the term «queer» in academic circles, or to associate the title of the novel to that of Burroughs' first one in his trilogy, *Junkie* (translated with the calque *Yonqui*). Reception of the translation was lukewarm. Some blogs highlighted the historical interest of the novel while objecting to the title, «una lectura breve, divertida por momentos y muy interesante desde un punto de vista histórico. Por lo menos, a mí me lo ha parecido. Por cierto, ¿por qué no habrán traducido el título por 'Marica', como ya hicieron cuando la incluyeron en la Colección Contraseñas?» (QUEER - WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS). Major newspapers like *El País* viewed the novel as somehow cryptic, «esclarecedora en sus propias tinieblas. Esto, también en cuanto al título, pero en la sustancia, si hay un libro nada reivindicativo o militante (cosas que horrorizaban al autor) ese es precisamente Queer» (Salas). Interestingly, the newspaper dismissed the value of the book as an LGBT+ novella, perhaps in consonance with the reigning view of Burroughs as the most straight of

gay writers, an idea that may spring from a translation that perhaps overlooks the necessary queer reading of the text. Other blogs dismiss the novel as outdated, «Leer esta novela en la actualidad, con la explosión homosexual que encierra en sus páginas, es como asistir a un despertar totalmente superado. *Queer* no impacta ahora lo que lo hizo en 1985, cuando se publicó, y mucho menos que cuando fue escrita» ('Queer', un texto fundacional de William S. Burroughs). The choice of the term queer in Spanish, while understandable and profitable for the publishing house, lacks the political value of the original in English. It is not coincidental, then, that its second edition was quickly retitled *Marica* (Fag), which renders the translation closer to the reader's culture while better positioning Burroughs as a transgressive author.

Narrated in the third-person, the novel recounts the life of Lee, Burroughs' alter ego, living in Mexico City as an expatriate. He has stopped using heroin and this makes him more vulnerable (as opposed to his condition in *Junkie*, his previous novel). Lee is susceptible, unsure and infatuated with a young man named Allerton, who becomes the object of his desire. The story opens with Lee looking at Allerton at a bar and pointing out, «I could use that, if the family jewels weren't in pawn to Uncle Junk» (1). The irony of the expression, the slight incongruity, the objectification of the male body, his substance-abuse-induced impotence seen as a joke, and the desacralization of Uncle Sam into Uncle Junk, converts «the serious into the frivolous» (Sontag 1961/2001, 275), and provides the first instance of camp in the novel. Souto's translation reads, «Podría usar eso, si las joyas de la familia no estuvieran empeñadas con el tío Caballo» (53). By offering a rather literal translation of «I could use that», and «the family jewels» Souto provides a certain awkwardness and foreignness to the expression that looks incongruous enough for a drug addict. However, to a certain extent the objectification of Allerton falls short, as does the translation «tío Caballo.» In this case, the irony in the use of «caballo», peninsular Spanish slang for heroin, is lost for most of the Spanish-speaking world outside of Spain. By contrast, the Spanish word for «horse» awakens in the reader the idea of virility, strength and health, undermining the notion of physical deterioration and vulnerability that is the backbone of the novel. In that respect, following Harvey's (2000) model of analysis, the irony, incongruity and sexual interest may remain intact for peninsular readers, while the text falls flat for Latin American readers.

Later in the story, Lee is retelling a dialogue he has had before, «Got to talking to a queer doctor and his boyfriend. The doctor was a major in the Medical Corps. The boyfriend is some kind of engineer. Awful-looking little bitch» (4). Hyperbole and queer-naming are also strategies used in camp according to Harvey (2000), and they are represented in this case in Lee's catty back talking about the doctor and his boyfriend. Souto's rendition captures the tone of Lee's vilifying in «Conversé con un médico marica y con su novio. El médico es comandante en el Cuerpo Médico. El novio algo así como ingeniero. Una bruja horrible» (55). While «bruja» may well be a term within the gay community, the combination of «bruja horrible» tones down of the original

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as «bitch» carries the connotation of cattiness and servility –implying the boyfriend's position as a bottom, perhaps– that goes beyond the ugliness expressed. Penelope and Wolfe (1979) ascertain that in gay camp, «most of the words are borrowed, meaning unchanged, from heterosexual male slang» (3). In that respect, «bruja» does not dignify the epithet.

Further in the novel, Lee chastises himself for trying to steal someone else's boyfriend, «You must be crazy, making passes in that direction, when you know what a bitch he is. These borderline characters can out-bitch any fag» (7). Once again, queer slang is present as an instance of camp language used to highlight a fake adherence to morals that Harvey (2000) posits. Souto applies certain instances of slang in «Debes estar loco –se dijo Lee– intentando ligar en esa dirección cuando sabes la arpía que es. Esos personajes dudosos pueden ser más venenosos que cualquier maricón» (58), but falls short as regards the amount of gay slang required to overload Lee's expression. By using «bitch», «out-bitch» and «fag» in one utterance, Lee establishes his persona as a gay connoisseur and participant of the queer underworld. The mainstream, standard choice of «arpía» and «venenosos» falls short in the direction of character creation. Penelope and Wolfe (1979) note that «camp humor depends upon the put-down, in which one human being gains status by belittling another» (10). As such, the camp style of the scene is diluted in favor of a less derogatory articulation of ideas.

Other times, Harvey's (2000) notion of the false sincerity, cattiness and effeminacy of camp is lost completely. When Lee is trying to seduce Allerton, he touches his sweater and says, «'Sweet stuff, dearie,' he said. 'That wasn't made in México'» (43). The combination of the butch «sweet stuff» and the effeminate «dearie» create a counterpoint that presents a translation problem. Souto chose to translate, «Lee tocó el sweater–. Qué bonito –dijo–. Esto no lo han hecho en México» (87). By compensating the masculine expression «sweet stuff» with the more feminine «Qué bonito» Souto preserves the campy tone. However, the masculine in Lee is blurred, taking the role of the hunter away from him and only preserving the more delicate side of Lee in an instance of oversimplification of this gay persona that hampers a queer reading of the text.

In another moment of the novel, Lee advises his friend Guidry not to take men to his apartment as they rob him. Guidry complains, «I don't mind the watch and the radio, but it really hurt, losing those boots. They were a thing of beauty and a joy forever» (33). The intertext of John Keats' poem «Endymion» makes the dialogue campy due to the hyperbolic comparison of his boots to a wonder of the world: Hyperbole, exclamation, frivolousness and intertexts are used to set a campy tone. Even though Souto's translation, «No me importa el reloj, y tampoco la radio. Lo que de veras me duele son esas botas. Eran una cosa bella y una alegría eterna» (79) transmits the message providing irony to the dialogue; yet the tone of Keats' famous line is lost, thus undermining the campiness of the expression by not trivializing one of the most recognizable lines in the English language and choosing content over form. The

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translation P. L. Ugalde Ramo made of John Keats' «Endymion» proves both focused on form and content and preserving the lyricism of the original, «Una obra hermosa es eterna alegría» (qtd. in Enríquez Aranda 243). The campy tone would have thus been heightened had Souto chosen this intertext.

This analysis does not intend to apply a prescriptive view to Souto's translation. Rather, it aims at underlining successful translation strategies and strategies that may have missed the mark in the recreation of camp in Spanish. Burton's (2010) approach to translation through heavy annotation, «supplementing» and «over-translating […] with prefaces and footnotes highlighting the translator's role» (Burton) stems from the desire to best apprehend and transmit the values of queer culture in other languages. This is not a novelty in Peninsular Spanish translation, as in 1978 Alberto Cardín and Biel Mesquida translated Franco-Argentine author Copi's novel *Le bal des folles* (1977) adding a «five-page glossary […] essential for 'straight' readers» (Mérida Jiménez 213). I have pointed out that Burton's (2010) perspective is perhaps more adequate as a form of translation practice but it may not result convenient for analysis. In this respect, Harvey's (2000) model used here means to assess Souto's translation from the point of view of the critic's nine different camp features. Therefore, this analysis intends to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of Souto's work from the necessary perspective of a queer reading of *Queer* in Spanish.

The final example here is not so much connected with camp but with the construction of the LGBT+ community (a concern shared by Harvey, too), and how certain semantic fields may undermine a queer reading of the novel. Lee decides to come out to Allerton, the object of his affection:

> Lee ordered two glasses of red wine. «So Dumé told you about my, uh, proclivities?» he said abruptly.
>
> «Yes», said Allerton, his mouth full.
>
> «A curse. Been in our family for generations. The Lees have always been perverts. […] when the baneful word seared my reeling brain: **I was a homosexual**. I thought of the painted, simpering female impersonators I had seen in a Baltimore night club. Could it be possible that I was one of those subhuman things? (39)

Lee chooses to disclose his sexual orientation, but in doing so, he calls it «proclivities», that is, a natural liking of something considered bad. Having established the naturalness of his preference, he then explores a semantic field that includes «curse», «perverts», baneful word», «seared», «reeling» and concludes with «homosexual». He then proposes the lexical string of «falsehood» with the words «painted», «simpering» and «impersonators» to define drag queens negatively as «subhuman things.» This excerpt establishes a balance between the natural and the unnatural, as Lee sets up the binary opposites of male/effeminate, real/fake and heterosexual/homosexual.

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Souto downtones many of the features that help highlight the complexity of the character by failing to find a balance through compensation:

> Lee pidió dos copas de vino tinto.
> – ¿Así que Dumé te habló de mis… tendencias? –dijo de repente.
> – Sí –dijo Allerton con la boca llena.
> – Una maldición –dijo Lee–. La lleva nuestra familia desde hace varias generaciones. Los Lee siempre han sido pervertidos. […] cuando la nefasta palabra me quemó el tambaleante cerebro: *homosexual*. Yo era homosexual. Pensé en los travestis pintarrajeados, con sonrisas bobaliconas, que había visto en un club nocturno de Baltimore. ¿Era posible que yo fuera una de esas cosas subhumanas? (84)

Souto's translation highlights the negative side of his coming out by preserving the negative load of the semantic field with terms such as «maldición», «pervertidos», «nefasta» but he adds to that negative load by translating «sear» as «quemó» (which is technically «grabar a fuego») thus incorporating the connotation of lack of reason associated with a burnt brain. Additionally, he repeats the word «homosexual» twice with a period in between, thus creating a dramatic pause that heightens its denotative load. In turn, the fake smiles of the drag queens become «bobaliconas», (stupid) stressing the notion of lack of intelligence and animalistic instinct in them. Finally, the choice of the masculine article to introduce «travestis» can be read as offensive and demeaning. Instead of opting for the empowerment (limited at that, of course) of a personal choice of gender expression and a manipulated insincerity, Souto's translation makes the scene sordid, stripping characters of whatever limited empowerment they may have enjoyed on the cultural margins in the 1950s.

8. THE WALLS THAT TRANSLATION PULLS DOWN, OR THE FENCES WE SET BETWEEN US ONCE AGAIN

Back in the 1950s, around the time Burroughs wrote his novel, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956) proposed that the categories and distinctions in every language spring from the mode of perception, analysis and action of the cultures that give origin to those languages. For this reason, just as languages differ, so does the form in which their speakers perceive reality and act accordingly. A contemporary of Whorf, Edward Sapir (1958), has indicated that:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. […] The worlds

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> in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (69).

It is for this reason that translations have to carefully examine the culture that has given origin to these words while at the same time considering how these ideas may best fit the target readerships to transmit equivalent effects. Post-Stonewall fiction is broad and encompassing, and it uses language and tackles issues that are oftentimes taboo.

Translation gives texts a louder voice for more people to hear. In the same way as translation has helped other liberationist groups to express themselves beyond the language barrier, queer translation may also contribute to untangle gay literature to better translate queer fiction. When in the hands of the establishment, ruled by *malestream* desire, the translation of queer fiction runs the risk of accommodating for heteronormative tastes in ways that would oppose the very essence of queer literature.

Marcial Souto used many positive translation strategies in his rendition of *Queer* such as some LGBT+ slang, the technique of compensation and certain instances of addition or subtraction. Nevertheless, his translation proves too regional in his choices of slang and accommodates for peninsular Spanish tastes only, a vast minority within the Spanish-speaking world. Additionally, sometimes he missed the connotation of words in his attempt to compensate or highlight the marginality of the characters. Nonetheless, it is important to add that Souto's reading of the original was not unlike that of most English-speaking critics who prefer to think of William Burroughs as a man's man who happened to be gay. A queer reading of his novel unravels the complexities of camp language and a particularly queer writing style that deserves further analysis in English as in Spanish.

In this respect, queerspeech poses peculiarities in its analysis and in its translation. If the translator fails in their job, the result may be a series of characters that lack emotional depth and a distinctive speech. This failure may end up homogenizing instead of queerifying. Queer criticism may contribute to untangle LGBT+ American fiction to better translate queer voices. The danger the translation of queer literature runs is to accommodate for heteronormative tastes in ways that would betray its very essence.

Gender studies and translation studies have much in common such as an intrinsic interdisciplinary approach. When they touch, so do myriad issues such as gender differences, genderized language, transfer, correspondence, appropriation of cultural spaces and the like. In a world that is little by little standardizing, our very identity can only be safeguarded in the language that we speak, in the words that we choose. Words are the unique, individual form we have of communicating. The gay liberation

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movement meant a voice for those who had long been quiet. Translation has always been a bridge for our ideas to cross over; it cannot become a weapon to kill the very ideas it is supposed to transmit.

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